

Nominated for the Public Eye People's Award 2012

by Pesticide Action Network North America, www.panna.org:

Syngenta

Headquarters:	Basel, Switzerland
Industry:	agrochemical
Revenue / Profit:	USD 11.64 billion (2010) / USD 1.4 billion
Owned by:	publicly-listed corporation
Employees:	26,000
CEO:	Michael Mack
Website:	www.syngenta.com

Summary

Selling elsewhere what can't be sold at home: The Swiss company Syngenta is the world's largest agrochemical producer, and it sells numerous acutely toxic products that harm people and the environment. Thousands of farmers have suffered severe acute and chronic effects from occupational use. Despite being banned in Europe, Syngenta continues to aggressively market its paraquat herbicide in the Global South. The corporation conducted a smear campaign against a scientist critical of its atrazine pesticide, and even attempted to buy his silence. Atrazine has contaminated 90 percent of drinking water in the U.S. Midwest.

Irresponsible Corporate Behavior

Syngenta produces acutely toxic products that poison people and the environment. Its flagship product paraquat (trade name Gramoxone) is the top-selling acutely toxic herbicide for the past 50 years. Syngenta's lobbying is decidedly aggressive: As the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) moved to ban atrazine – an herbicide already banned in Europe – the corporation arranged 50 meetings behind closed doors with agency members and thus avoided a ban. Moreover, Syngenta stands out because of its particularly offensive smear campaigns. In one case, Syngenta attempted to buy the silence of a scientist, to attack his research budget, to damage his academic reputation, and decided in the end for the classic maneuver: funding an opposing study.

Consequences

Many in the Global South have lost their lives through the use of paraquat. One farmer died less than four hours after applying paraquat with a leaky container. Others died because of inadvertent contact with the herbicide. Thousands upon thousands suffer from acute and chronic symptoms of poisoning from occasional use. The intake of less than a teaspoon of paraquat is fatal, and there is no antidote. Another herbicide, atrazine, has contaminated more than 90 percent of drinking water in the U.S. Midwest, and is likely linked to the rising cases of cancer, birth defects and hormonal disorders in the region.

Current Status and Demands on the Company

Syngenta must stop the sale of paraquat, most urgently in developing countries where the cases of death and illness are many. In the U.S., Syngenta must stop trying to sabotage the investigation into atrazine's effects, and allow the EPA to conduct a fair and unhindered evaluation process.

Further Information

Pesticide Action Network on Syngenta:

www.panna.org/resources/corporate-accountability/profiles/syngenta#4

Pesticide Action Network on atrazine:

www.panna.org/resources/specific-pesticides/atrazine

Pesticide Action Network on paraquat:

www.panap.net/sites/default/files/monograph_paraquat.pdf